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San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors Approves New Cold Case Task Force

District Attorney Ron Freitas and Sheriff Pat Withrow partner to bring justice to families

Stockton, CA — The San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors has approved the creation of a new Countywide Cold Case Task Force, a collaborative, multi-agency initiative spearheaded by District Attorney Ron Freitas and Sheriff Pat Withrow. The task force will be dedicated to solving the County's more than 600 unsolved cases, including homicides, missing persons with suspicious circumstances, and sexual assaults.

The Board also approved a \$500,000 increase in the District Attorney's Family Justice Center budget to support the new initiative, with funding allocated from the Proposition 69 DNA Identification Fund. These funds will assist with critical DNA testing, forensic analysis, and the implementation of new investigative technologies.

"This task force is about hope and justice for families who've waited far too long," said Supervisor Paul Canepa, Chair of the San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors. "The DA and Sheriff are working together to include the right people and the right tools to finally get answers, and we are proud to support their efforts. These families deserve to know what happened to their loved ones, and we're doing everything we can to make that happen."

The Cold Case Task Force is the result of a formal Partnership and Cooperation Agreement signed in October 2024 by the San Joaquin County District Attorney's Office, Sheriff's Office, local police departments, and the California Department of Justice. The task force will meet regularly to share investigative strategies, coordinate digital case tracking, prioritize cases, and ensure consistent communication with victims' families.

"We're not just opening old files - we're reigniting a commitment to truth. The Cold Case Task Force brings together expertise, technology and determination to deliver answers and accountability. For every family still waiting, this is our pledge: we won't stop until justice is served," commented District Attorney Ron Freitas.

San Joaquin County Sheriff Patrick Withrow echoed that commitment to victims' families, "The San Joaquin County Cold Case Task Force represents our unwavering commitment to justice. Every unsolved case is a promise we made to a victim and their loved ones — a promise that we will never stop seeking the truth. No matter how much time has passed, we owe it to our community to bring answers, closure, and accountability."

The task force will also leverage private forensic laboratories to supplement DNA testing, a necessary step given the current backlog at the Department of Justice. The investment in advanced testing and cross-agency collaboration was a key recommendation of the 2024 San Joaquin County Grand Jury report, which called for enhanced efforts to reduce the county's backlog of unsolved cases.

The District Attorney's Office will coordinate with the Auditor-Controller's Office to finalize the appropriation adjustments. Fiscal planning for continued task force operations will be incorporated into the 2025-2026 budget cycle.

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